

AN ANARCHIST PERIODICAL FROM THE OCCUPIED LENAPE TERRITORY KNOWN AS PHILADELPHIA

# ANATHEMA

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**WHAT WENT DOWN - 2 // BE GAY, DO CRIMES: A SHORT HISTORY OF BASH BACK! - 3 //**  
**TWO POINTS ABOUT MASS ACTION - 4 // RED BELLY: REFLECTIONS ON SQUATTING AN**  
**AUTONOMOUS GARDEN - 9 // LEARNING LESSONS - 10 // WHAT IS A-SPACE? - 11 // FUCK**  
**THE LAW - 12**

## WHAT WENT DOWN

**June 18:** PNC Bank branch at 4753 North Broad Street robbed using “threatening demand note.”

**Late June:** Mariner East 2 pipeline construction site sabotaged. “If you visit the pipeline route, machines and other infrastructure are everywhere, and many are still unguarded.”

**June 26:** Graffiti for Antwon Rose, killed by Pittsburgh police, spotted in South Philly.

**June 26:** Philadelphia ICE agents Bryan Thomas McPherson, Daniel Finn, Doug Green, Robert Pate, Lynette Lowe, Kathy Trim, Brandon K Gill and Erik S are doxxed.

**June 30:** Citizens Bank branch at 7327 Frankford Avenue robbed when person made verbal demand for money.

**June:** A pro-life billboard is defaced by Feminist Anarchist Vandals in solidarity with Eric King and the struggle against ICE and borders. “To be clear we don’t just mean freedom for women but freedom for anyone constrained by a social role or jailer.”

**June:** Explosive devices used to relieve ATMs of their money in beer stores and deli.

**July 2:** An occupation forms outside of the ICE office in Chinatown, initially disrupting ICE activities. The first night of the occupation saw light clashes with police across barricades which led to strong disagreements between occupiers on questions of defense, longevity,

and intentions. Four days later, the occupation voluntarily disbanded on the night of July 5th. The camp was attacked by police multiple times during its existence.

**July 5:** An occupation forms outside of City Hall in Center City following the end of the ICE occupation.

**July 8:** A banner is dropped in Center City in solidarity with #OccupyICEPHL “Mayor Kenney End PARS”

**July 10:** Two members of the “Mama Bear Brigade,” part of the Middletown Coalition for Community Safety, are arrested during a sit-in at a Mariner East 2 pipeline construction site in Delaware County.

**July 12:** Up-and-coming real estate developer (i.e. gentrifying former football star with a history of violence) is stabbed after he drunkenly stepped out of his friend’s Mercedes and allegedly harassed and tackled a young poet near Rittenhouse Square, in part because of his race. The developer died of his wounds.

**July:** Prison strike graffiti found throughout the city, including in West Philly, South Philly, Center City and on freight trains.

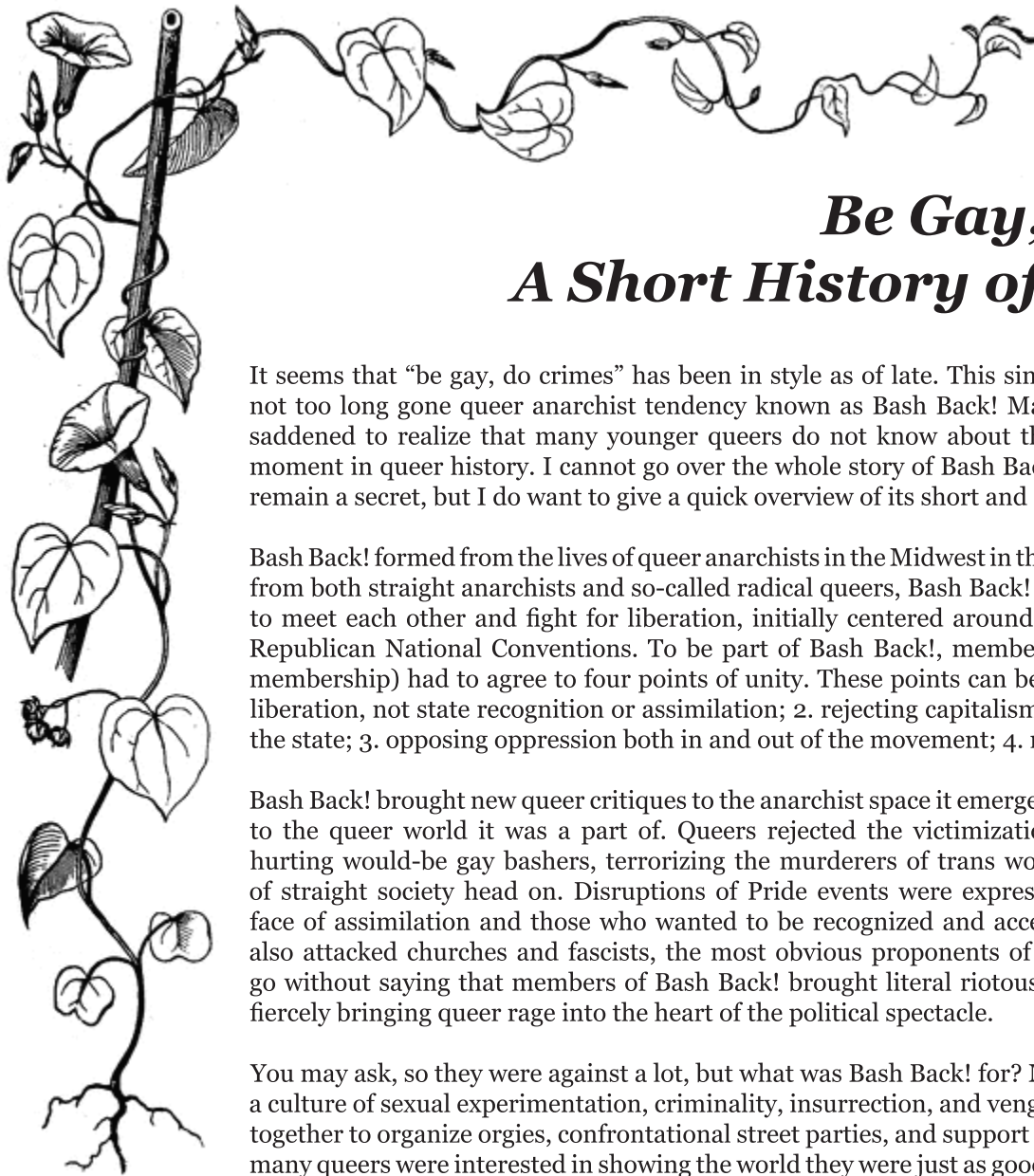
**July 16:** Police shoot and kill an #OccupyICEPHL protester’s dog a few blocks away from the camp.

**July 18:** A short march becomes a noisy protest outside of ICE offices in Center City. ★

## ANATHEMA ACCEPTS SUBMISSIONS!

Anathema is a monthly newspaper published by anarchists and based out of the occupied Lenape territory known as Philadelphia. We welcome submissions to the paper and want to include a range of contributions from an anti-authoritarian perspective. The editors do not necessarily agree with the viewpoints published in this newspaper, or even with each other ;-). While some of our shared views aren’t up for negotiation, we tend to see difference and conflict as integral not only to human life, but also to a struggle for freedom that can deepen and grow. To that end, the newspaper is intended to provide space for dialogue and debate as well as sharing information and analysis and feelings that are not legitimated by many other forums. The paper’s content tends to be published anonymously in order to provide a more secure space to talk and scheme in a time of growing surveillance and repression.

We publish news stories, poems, drawings, political analysis, letters to the editor, reportbacks, critiques of us, and any other style of writing you want to contribute. You can email submissions to [anathemaphl@riseup.net](mailto:anathemaphl@riseup.net).



## ***Be Gay, Do Crimes: A Short History of Bash Back!***

It seems that “be gay, do crimes” has been in style as of late. This simple phrase reminds me of the not too long gone queer anarchist tendency known as Bash Back! Maybe I’m an old hag, but I feel saddened to realize that many younger queers do not know about this flamboyant and incendiary moment in queer history. I cannot go over the whole story of Bash Back! and some parts will forever remain a secret, but I do want to give a quick overview of its short and controversial existence.

Bash Back! formed from the lives of queer anarchists in the Midwest in the late 2000s. Feeling estranged from both straight anarchists and so-called radical queers, Bash Back! was a way for queer anarchists to meet each other and fight for liberation, initially centered around opposing the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. To be part of Bash Back!, members (there was never an official membership) had to agree to four points of unity. These points can be summed up as: 1. fighting for liberation, not state recognition or assimilation; 2. rejecting capitalism, imperialism, and all forms of the state; 3. opposing oppression both in and out of the movement; 4. respecting a diversity of tactics.

Bash Back! brought new queer critiques to the anarchist space it emerged from, and anarchist critiques to the queer world it was a part of. Queers rejected the victimization so often assigned to them; hurting would-be gay bashers, terrorizing the murderers of trans women, confronting the violence of straight society head on. Disruptions of Pride events were expressions of queer defiance in the face of assimilation and those who wanted to be recognized and accepted. Members of Bash Back! also attacked churches and fascists, the most obvious proponents of a patriarchal world. It should go without saying that members of Bash Back! brought literal riotous energy to the DNC and RNC, fiercely bringing queer rage into the heart of the political spectacle.

You may ask, so they were against a lot, but what was Bash Back! for? Members of Bash Back! created a culture of sexual experimentation, criminality, insurrection, and vengeance. Rebellious queers came together to organize orgies, confrontational street parties, and support systems for one another. While many queers were interested in showing the world they were just as good as their straight counterparts, Bash Back! embraced the criminality imposed on queers and ran with it. Gangs, survival crime, and the joy of destruction and revenge contributed to a queer criminal lineage that extends from the first queers into the present.

Bash Back! dissolved due to internal differences. As the tendency became more popular, differences emerged, and eventually ended the network. At Bash Back! convergences, queers disagreed whether their violence was literal or symbolic, whether they wanted to create new queer identities or not be identities at all, and a host of other questions. Many feel that the influx of newcomers from academic and radical queer circles without a cultural base in insurrectionary anarchy led to the disagreement and division, though it certainly wasn’t the only factor.

Even though Bash Back! as a network is gone, the practices and relations developed during that period certainly live on. Queers continue to send bigots to the hospital, steal and scam their way to decadence, take militant direct action against the state and capital, and create networks of care and support for each other. When I hear the words “be gay, do crimes” I like to imagine they are simply another iteration of the words heard at the last Bash Back! convergence: “Bash Back! is dead. Bash back forever!”

I highly recommend that anyone interested in Bash Back! read the book *Queer Ultraviolence: Bash Back! Anthology*, especially if they can get their hands on one of the older unabridged editions. ★



## TWO POINTS ABOUT MASS ACTION

### SUBMISSION

Recently, the call went out: “we need more people!” It was a call we have heard before, but despite its simplicity it is difficult to ascertain what was meant. It is a call anchored to the strategy of mass actions. Of course, the debate over whether to get involved in mass action or not is ongoing: is it worth it? what does it accomplish? will it just be another parade? another exhausting hangout that ends in waiting inside or outside the jail? But despite this debate, people continue to attempt mass actions and anarchists continue to be involved. So, for those who try to make or hear the call “we need more people,” this article offers two things to consider, one concerning the structure of organization and the other concerning tactics and strategy.

#### **1. Mass action means strangers**

As the result of some cognitive inadequacy, it is easy to imagine you know “everyone” in a political milieu. This misconception can appear to be confirmed by the pattern that demonstrations follow in moments of low activity: always the same people, the familiar crowd, the known formal groups many cling to in these downtimes for something *to do*. But this feeling of familiarity cannot hold, especially when there is a resurgence of mass actions. The formal orgs will scramble to take names, make lists of interests, and make sure everyone has their proper place within the appropriate group. But this will only hold until a critical mass spills outside their frameworks and into the streets. This process is made practically inevitable when these same groups spend days sending out calls for “more people.” They thought they knew “everyone” until “more people” actually showed up.

When some of these people don’t want to join the group that matches their apparent interests, when some resist recruitment into the latest coalition, when some don masks and don’t introduce themselves, this should come as no surprise. Only so many people can actually know each other, intimately trust each other. Whether the activists want to accept it or not, there is a good chance that most people who want to be in a formal organization, organizing in the conventional fashion, already are.

For the small handful (if that) of activists who read this paper and knit their brows at the likelihood of anonymous strangers showing up at their camp unwilling to assimilate to the norms, you would do well to consider how this anonymity *can* be a good thing. Not only is it literally impossible for you to know “everyone,” these informal and distant relationships have their benefits. Even for those anarchists who tend to organize informally instead of via formal organizations, it is not always immediately evident what this will look like, accustomed as we are to operating in small groups. Sometimes the major difference between the

affinity group and the “mass” organizer is that the organizer doesn’t acknowledge that they are part of a small group.

The primary benefit of mass actions by strangers is well known to the affinity group: it is harder to trace your networks. The affinity group typically acts autonomously, anonymously, and keeps their mouths shut. What changes in the mass action is that suddenly there are others doing the same thing, people who, relatively, aren’t part of your network. This benefit of strangers is often missed by or even inconceivable to the informal anarchist, so used to concealing their delimited networks. Suddenly the network is opaque because it is simply unclear to everyone how these strangers ended up in the same place at the same time.

The primary concern that has been vocalized is one of political accountability. How can these strangers be held *accountable for their actions* (or agendas) if they are not only anonymous but part of no discernable group? You might assume that this kind of evaluation of others’ actions and agendas is primarily a concern of activists, with their interest in controlling action and policing ideology. But it should concern us too: the Nazis involved in the Maidan events in the Ukraine, or (closer to home) the Stalinists involved in Occupy ICE should remind us that the goals of strangers fighting next to us in the street are sometimes in conflict with our own. Even if a mass action cannot be held to the same standard as a small action of ideologically similar comrades, everyone has their limits on who should be included.

However, top-down control cannot inoculate mass action against the entryism of our enemies. While many formal organizers welcomed the increase of identifiable and recognizable groups in the recent Occupy ICE camps, it is not as if the existence of well-known organizers with social cred and a formal org that depends on their “hard work” has ever been a recipe for accountability. Not to mention that formal orgs tend to privilege not just charismatic but “respectable” spokespeople at the expense of individuals who do not or cannot be in the spotlight (this is worrisome for actions that claim to act for the undocumented with organizers who only know how to act in support of them by “centering” the marginalized in a representational and mediatized framework—more surveillance is not exactly what undocumented people need). If our main concern is that people will take part in mass actions that have authoritarian agendas or otherwise oppressive aims, then formal organizations are not the best means of prevention.

While certainly not a sure thing, autonomy is one of our best bulwarks against the authoritarians and oppressors who wheedle their way into our midst. The less control that one particular group or set has over the mass action, the more



likely it is that people can confront members of that group. This brings us to the second point I want to make about mass action: the necessity of autonomy.

## ***2. Strangers means Autonomy***

If you are participating in a mass action with strangers, then other people's actions will by necessity act autonomously to some extent. When you have only participated in small actions, it's easy to imagine new people trickling in and giving them a run-down on the plan and how to act. This image goes out the window when hundreds show up to your call. But even if your action, like the Philly Occupy ICE camp, is dozens not hundreds, not everyone will be looking for the official plan and follow suit. What's important to keep in mind is that when organizers attempt to implement their pre-set plan as if any deviation will be detrimental, they are no longer organizing action, they are acting against it.

As usual, this problem became clear over the question of nonviolence at Philly's Occupy ICE blockade. What makes this example different (or at least interesting) is that it made clear how the rhetoric of nonviolence is less divisive than it is a diversion. The partisans of nonviolence mobilize this ideal all too often to curtail and obstruct autonomous action. This is not surprising since the actual adherents to nonviolent philosophy are far fewer than there are micro-managers who opportunistically latch onto the term. This is particularly true among the organizers of Occupy ICE in Philadelphia who were disproportionately self-proclaimed revolutionaries. Many of them openly admitted that nonviolence was a purely strategic stance vis-à-vis the police presence. What they don't admit or don't accept is that nonviolent tactics are anathema to mass organizing of strangers. They hold fast to the idea that nonviolence is popular and therefore strategic, even though this strategy traditionally requires top-down organizing and intensive training.

Even if we oppose nonviolence on principle, we should call into question the dichotomy the organizers imposed. Since we aren't talking about highly disciplined and well-trained nonviolent idealists here, whatever their merits, but pragmatic activists describing a mass action, what do they mean by nonviolence or, for that matter, violence? Nonviolence is commonly associated with conventional activism, the normative ritual, from which violence appears as the deviation, threatening, in this case, the orderly and successful execution of the occupation. It's strange then that what was being described as a violent escalation was simply a barricade. Contrary to popular belief, occupations were not invented 7 years ago on Wall Street by pacifists in tents. And

typically, they include barricades.

It should go without saying that occupiers generally employ barricades not as a provocation but as a strategic form of defense. This is because, besides the nonviolent martyr, most people would rather have something between themselves and the police baton or pepper spray. The organizers' appeal to the popularity of nonviolence doesn't take into account the even more popular notion that people like to be able to defend themselves when attacked. Nonviolent defenselessness is not really most people's default position, however popular the optics, particularly if there is a simple alternative like putting something between you and the weapon. Most importantly, if you are organizing with strangers, they will not all respond to an attack in the same fashion (some will run, some lock arms, others defend themselves), and barricades fit better into this mixed company.

The activists will say (or "vague-book") that any tactic outside of their repertoire is a provocation. The logic being that any deviation from strict nonviolence is a slippery slope to an armed confrontation. But again, since we are discussing "revolutionaries," not just pacifists, what they agree on is not that violence is forever excluded but that any deviation from the current stage of the plan is too volatile and unpredictable, leading to un-strategic actions. They are arguing for strategic nonviolence, but the logic here is a logical fallacy: the slippery slope.

Slippery slopes can go both ways, but the slope is always slipperier on the other side. We could equally argue that nonviolence easily slips into a rationale opposed to any confrontation. It is not long after the revolutionary decries the violence of the barricade that we hear the liberal ask, "Isn't it violent to disrupt my day, to obstruct my commute to work?" In my experience, this mobilization of the nonviolent rhetoric is much more common than the occupier transmogrifying from barricade builder to guerrilla. For better or worse, it's extremely rare for occupations to become the site of insurrections and extremely common for the rhetoric of revolutionaries to be used against them by liberals. But this is beside the point: I only want to demonstrate that slippery slope arguments are not a convincing basis for a strategy.

All this line of argument creates is a contradiction in which the organizer calls for a mass action but excludes autonomy, thereby precluding the involvement of larger groups of people. It is not shocking then that the occupation did not prevent a police attack but merely dwindled the numbers

*[Cont. on pg. 8]*

***What's important to keep in mind is that when organizers attempt to implement their pre-set plan as if any deviation will be detrimental, they are no longer organizing action, they are acting against it.***



***For more information on the prison strike***

*<https://fireinside.noblogs.org> - h*

*[https://redistributethepain.wordpress](https://redistributethepain.wordpress.com)*

*[https://itsgo](https://itsgonna.com)*





*ke set to begin on August 21st, check out:*

<https://incarceratedworkers.org>

[s.com - https://michiganabolition.org](https://michiganabolition.org)

[ingdown.org](https://ingdown.org)



*["Two points..." cont. from pg. 5]*

of those attacked down to the few participants willing to withstand the brunt of the assault without defenses, their bodies the only barricades left (all the while calls for "more people" continued to circulate).

Strategic nonviolence neither brought in the necessary numbers nor prevented an escalation with the police. These two problems are likely interrelated. If there were hundreds at the camp, the police might not have attacked. Why? Because they would be afraid. While we can never know precisely why police attack or do not attack, it's a strange assumption that police are less likely to attack defenseless people. We know that barricades were taken down under duress, that the police threatened to attack, but it should go without saying that we shouldn't obey their directions—they are not trying to help. They are trying to make it easier to attack us.

Police might not have been any more afraid of a dumpster than they are of an anarchist with a rock, but they would much rather attack a defenseless camp than fall over barricades or dodge projectiles. It might not be a symmetrical fight, but we should keep in mind that not even the police want their jobs to be hard or dangerous. Another thing we know about the police is that they regard weakness and vulnerability as a reason in itself to attack someone. The rationale that curtails autonomy in the name of nonviolence is not only authoritarian, it is also strategically wrong-headed.

Either way, the police will attack. The question is what puts us at an advantage, what deters their head-on assault, or protects us in the eventuality of one. In a small group action that does not require numbers or strangers, I can imagine individuals committing to a predetermined vision

of nonviolence and acting in a unified manner. In a mass action, there is not even a shared vision of what this term means, let alone a means to implement a completely unified approach. Discussions over the problem of repression will continue to happen, but the solution will not be found in the organizers' blueprint.

Mass actions need to begin with the assumption that people will act autonomously and learn to coordinate with strangers acting differently in the street. This is what we mean when we say "diversity of tactics;" it is never simply an assertion of a specific tactic, but a recognition that the preconditions of mass action is the presence of autonomous participants. Otherwise, we have mass actions that view their participants as obstacles to one another, organizers spending more time trying to control anarchists than confronting the state.

In the unlikely event that you are one of those who find it frustrating that insurrectionaries show up and contaminate your perfectly ordered plan with spontaneous disruptions and are still reading Anathema, imagine how frustrating it is to be a stranger who responds to your call for "more people" and aren't in the minority that adhere to nonviolence when threatened.

For the rest of you, it is important to keep in mind that autonomy and diversity of tactics is not the intellectual property of insurrectionary anarchists or even anarchists. These terms describe the necessary preconditions for mass action, i.e. autonomy and the diversity of tactics are simply the reality of running through the streets with strangers who have different ideas of what to do. We should keep that in mind too. The point is to develop autonomy within these differences, not assert our vision of it onto them. If the anarchists want to participate in mass action, they too will have to learn to coordinate. ★



# RED BELLY: REFLECTIONS ON SQUATTING AN AUTONOMOUS GARDEN

## Submission

In the middle of that deep, cramped darkness of winter, dreams of the lushness of summer: colors, textures, breathing, full of green and life sustaining, begin to form a vision...

Vacant and abandoned land in Philly is dwindling due to the rapid effects of gentrification, but it is still here if we look for it.

For anyone interested in squatting a garden, it is important to examine your goals and to look into the intended space, its history, property records, sun & water patterns, obstacles, advantages, and potentials.

The location of Red Belly, a squatted garden in West Philly, was chosen based on proximity and its uniqueness. One exciting element was that it was/has been slated for the construction of a new condo complex. Now, most people would be discouraged to start a squatted garden on land that was in the midst of a building project approval, but the idea was not longevity, but to try and grow and harvest as much food and medicine as possible in the conditions available, while simultaneously resisting and putting pressure on developers attempting to further gentrify the neighborhood. It was an experiment, to say the least, but one that became quite fruitful.

Since February 2018, Red Belly has been occupied as an autonomous garden. To clarify, it is autonomous and not a "community" garden because the idea of "community" can be misleading. "Community" carries a lot of assumptions on who or how one can be involved. Rather than trying to cater to some imagined unity (of a neighborhood? friend group? etc.), the fact that it is autonomous simply is an acknowledgement that those who actively participate in creating and maintaining the space make the project possible.

The garden itself is full of an abundance of annual and perennial flowers, herbs, and food crops. It's about the size of a quarter of an acre within a larger one acre lot. The rest of the lot is full of reeds, weeds, trees, organic material, furniture, trash and wildlife (especially Robins, for which the garden is named). The majority of the materials for the garden were sourced for free and its "organization" or lack thereof simply falls to the self-directed efforts of individuals.

Approaching its 5th month of occupation, Red Belly has not been without its obstacles. Even though the majority of every single face to face interaction has been positive and in support of the garden, haters and developers eventually began to make moves to discourage and control the use of the land. But each obstacle encouraged an even stronger fight to maintain the space and frustrate the property owners.

Recently, around the time when an email, circulating from

Spruce Hill Zoning Committee, stating preparations for new phases of construction that would begin, and warning gardeners to clear out, an anonymous sign went up in defiance. It read,

*"Real estate developers are trying to build fancy condos on this lot. Right now there is an autonomous garden here after years of vacancy. Before it was vacant, it was another community garden that was destroyed by the same developers in their first attempts at construction."*

*This land is not ours.  
This land is not theirs either.*

*It is the land of the Lenni Lenape  
and of the birds  
and worms  
and sun  
and rain  
who live here*

*We don't want more condos, or concrete,  
No more gentrification and sterilization.*

*When the earth is dead, we are all dead too."*

Ultimately, the project of Red Belly in its entirety has been one of defiance. A refusal to accept the absurd bounds of private property, an attempt to sustain, share, and nurture as much as possible outside of an exploitative market economy, an experiment in illegality, and a big fuck you to the wealthy power-lords who are trying to change our neighborhoods into their personal money playgrounds. By the way, the owners of Red Belly are the corporation U3 Advisors, a Philadelphia based "nationally recognized consulting practice that provides real estate and economic development solutions to the institutions that anchor our communities." They have been responsible for other gentrifying establishments in Philly such as Clarkville in West, and the Temple University Health Center in North. The photos and personal information of all of the individuals who work for them is available on their website.

All in all, despite its minor frustrations, the process of squatting is a continual, practical, learning experience. The most valuable lessons to be taken from Red Belly are the importance of (and the proportionate amount of pleasure found in) risk taking and experimentation, and trying not to worry about the inevitability of defeat, but to instead embrace ephemeral projects and take charge with what's available, to make your dreams and passions come to fruition in as immediate a manner as possible. ★

## LEARNING LESSONS

The peace-policing at realized and attempted blockades of ICE by the yellow-vested socialists has become a bit of a joke, and not just in Philly, based on the latest from sub.media's The Fucking News. Once again, we can look to history for lessons that don't bear repeating – some as recent as our experiences during Occupy, and some as old as early-20th century revolutions. In recognizing such lessons, though, we must also ask ourselves what our intentions, strategies, and goals are when we enter into situations that involve working with authoritarians.

An anarchist slightly newer to these attempts at mass movements recently reflected to me that it was interesting to see all the demonizing of anarchists, which they'd been told stories about, very quickly come to pass during the recent attempt to blockade the ICE building downtown. It was the same demonizing that occurred when anarchists were labeled "The Cancer of Occupy," despite being (or at least among) the original callers for, facilitators/organizers of, and infrastructure builders of that movement nationwide – and certainly in notable numbers here in Philly. This phrase was invented by self-styled anti-authoritarian Chris Hedges in a notorious essay of the same name that attacked the "black-bloc anarchists," and was picked up by Occupiers who had already attempted to oust anarchists from the camps before the article's publication. Occupy has been in the news again recently, since activists that were involved have begun to run for and win political office – sadly (though predictably) re-framing those previous organizing efforts into the reformist power-grabs that were significantly resisted by so many at the time. In Philadelphia's Occupy encampment, it became necessary to present a defense of ourselves at a general assembly, featuring the perceptibly least-threatening of our ilk reading a prepared statement in bloc to illustrate our points – but this was largely a watering down of our ideas and potential much like the deliberate misunderstandings as to what construed Direct Action.

This is not so dissimilar from the forfeiture of anarchist principles by groups like the anarchist union the CNT during the Spanish Civil war in the 1930s, who chose to compromise with "Right-wing Socialists, Liberals, and Communists" in such ways as running members for political office in the new government that those "anti-fascist" authoritarians were building. Following this seemingly reasonable course of "left unity" and compromise soon led to the Popular Front government imprisoning and executing anarchists for being anarchists. In response to illegalist anarchists whom they saw as "uncontrollables" who risked disgracing their organization, the CNT-FAI issued a declaration that anyone (including anarchists) who carried out actions compromising the "revolutionary

order" would be shot without trial, and proceeded to do so.

This has happened in virtually every revolutionary moment in history in which anarchists collaborated with authoritarian Communists – Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, France, Greece, etc. Appeals for "Left Unity" should be considered much the way Orwell described the Popular Front in Spain, as invitations to "an alliance of enemies" that will end in "one partner swallowing the other." When some revolutionary actors prioritize maintaining a formal organization (whether that be a group or a socialist government) and adherence to its programs or plans, while others remain committed to spreading and living out the practices and principles that make us most free – a process which entails healthy forms of difference, conflict and uncontrollability – these sides will inevitably be practically irreconcilable. As we've seen over and over again, this is evident even in trying to coordinate small actions like occupations or demonstrations, belying the "long-game" logic of many anarchists who end up immediately compromising for reformist goals.

Although the latter side of this tension tends to be labeled "the anarchists," to name this conflict "everyone else vs. the anarchists" is inaccurate. Maybe it would more appropriately be labeled authoritarians vs. anti-authoritarians, or leftists vs. insurrectionaries, or activists vs. insurgents, but what these histories show us is that labels mean little and that it is our activities, and the principles from which they emerge, that make us compatible or incompatible with one another.

Even recent local history has shown that popular social movements will always fall far short of our aspirations. So why do we keep engaging with them? Is it to influence them in a better direction? To form relationships that will allow us to hold formal organizations up to their principles and prevent recuperation? To reduce our isolation from other radicals so that we can be better supported against repression? To help make anarchist or radical organizing more opaque – that is, with more overlapping and communication between tendencies – so that the state will have a harder time carrying out repressive measures in the first place?

It's important to recognize – when so many still do not – that many other so-called radicals are or will be our enemies down the line. This leads many of us to adopt an anti-social perspective and exclusively carry on our own struggles. But will bringing an anti-social attitude (by which I mean a presumptive and egotistical distaste for others) to a social movement scenario do anarchists any favors? When popular social movements are constrained to the extent that none of the strategic aspects of participating in them are possible without significant compromise, it seems we would be better off continuing to advance our own plans separately, creating examples that others will want to join given the opportunity. ★



# *What is A-Space?*

## *Submission*



Usually activists like anarchists just as long as anarchists are doing activism led by non-anarchists. As soon as anarchists create autonomous projects, they are accused of sectarianism, lifestylism, or adventurism. All of this is to be expected; when anarchists act autonomously together, they are often perceived as a threat to any carefully managed campaign. This is not news. What is perhaps more surprising is that sometimes activists don't like anarchists when their autonomous project is open to non-anarchists, when their collectives are diverse and eclectic but are still perceived as exclusively the product of whatever most-extreme tendency the activists can imagine. Most often, in this case, it's other anarchists making the accusations, anarchists who are suspicious of the influence of new tendencies and ideas that their activist friends distrust. They want to distance themselves from these other anarchists: these anarchists are not us, they are an aberration, what's more, they don't do anything. This peculiar (if not uncommon) set of circumstances led at least one anarchist recently to denounce A-space as having fallen to a nihilist takeover and since lost any function, exemplified by a recent dearth of political events taking place there.

These comments likely left people wondering: How did this takeover happen? What of this narrative is accurate? Others still likely wondered, "What is A-space?" Many Philadelphians, of course, have seen A-space and know that is some kind of social center in the heart of the commercial corridor on Baltimore Avenue. They may even know that it is reputed to be run by anarchists, but it's doubtful if they know how it is run or who runs it. Since the collective (in its various permutations) has rarely had a public presence in the space, the organization has become the unfortunate subject of speculation and rumor.

The fact that when people don't know the anarchists doing a thing, they will invent a caricature of them in order to discredit them goes to show the lengths to which people will bend their argument for the sake of an ad hominem attack (this is where ad hominem makes fast friends with strawmen). In the case of A-space, it is particularly suspicious considering that the truth of the matter is there is hardly a collective to speak of. More like a skeleton crew keeping the ship afloat, and none of them currently are nihilists. Interestingly, the last time nihilists were part of the collective was the last time the collective had a strong membership, regular meetings,

and political event planning. While the current organizers have fortunately kept the space going and available to a variety of people in the city, it was not the inclusion of the nihilists but their departure that marked a downturn of (anti)political activity in the space.

A few years back, the A-space collective was relatively large, active, and included members from different tendencies in addition to nihilists. If this was the case, we must wonder what motivates people unfamiliar with the organizing to invent a story of a nihilist takeover that drove the space into the ground? It seems that for some people, if nihilists are even present in an eclectic group they contaminate it, a few bad apples spoiling the whole bunch. This aversion to nihilists still needs to be explained and it would likely take some serious digging into the psyche of activists to dredge up their unconscious drive. But we can take a stab at it anyway and hypothesize. Over and over again, the activists claim they don't like nihilists because they never do anything; they repeat this even when they have no evidence or are proven wrong. This repetition is a symptom that provides a clue to their motive: we know the nihilists do things but what are they not doing? What desire are they not fulfilling for the activists?

We can arrive by a process of elimination. The non-anarchist activists say that the nihilists do not fulfill the promise of anarchism, even don't know what anarchism is. But when questioned, it's the accusers who seem to know little of different anarchist tendencies; it is they who rely on a reductive idea of anarchism that fits their personal values; they who generalize and pontificate about anarchism even when they admit they are hardly invested in its aims. Aims which of course include the kind of decentralization that easily accommodates a nihilist strain.

Alternatively, the activist-anarchists recognize that the other anarchists are anarchists. Their attack takes a different route: "What have you accomplished?" they ask rhetorically. If asked in earnest, an answer could be provided, one that might look like the timeline in this paper. It's true that anarchist projects can be harder to sustain, harder to make legible their effects or continuities. But what bar have they set that the anarchists cannot reach? What metric that makes their accomplishments negligible? If the meter is set so high that anarchist projects don't register, it's likely that none of

the activist actions would make the needle budge either.

If and when they acknowledge the anarchists' accomplishments, they view them as potential fodder for their cause. "You should listen and follow the leadership because they have more experience," the activists argue. Experience doing what? If your accomplishments include doing the same tired ritual every week with no other result than being welcomed by capitalism as the "good" kind of activist, it is difficult to see what you are bragging about.

If it's not ignorance, ineffectiveness, or inexperience that marks the anarchist project out for criticism, there must be a problem with the activists' critical framework. And, of course, it is because the only framework the activist ever uses requires the outcome to benefit the activist. The anarchists

have made a grave mistake, according to the activists, by neglecting to ask what their autonomous projects have contributed to an outside campaign. Almost laughably, then, their perceived failures are a direct result of their autonomy.

As an autonomous project, the only accomplishment that the A-space collective needs to worry about is running a space. Admittedly, this could be done better, but the main problem isn't the inclusion of nihilists, it's the lack of collective members. Fortunately, A-space remains a relatively open collective, which makes its present membership less a problem than an opportunity. If anarchists wanted to do things at the A-space, as collective members or just booking the space for an event, they can. There is no screening process to prove or disprove that you are nihilists.★

## ***FUCK THE LAW***

### ***Updates on Repression***

The saga surrounding the most recent defacing of the Frank Rizzo mural has finally come to an end. The Mural Arts Program and the court system did not want to stick to their guns and go to trial; as trial grew nearer and nearer, numerous plea deals were offered, each more ludicrous than the last. In the end the prosecution offered the accused person a deal: pay a hefty sum and have all their charges dropped! The vandalism had stirred up controversy around the Mural Arts Program, and challenged the place of white supremacist monuments in the city.

The last remaining defendants of the notorious J20 case, a mass arrest of anti-Trump protesters on inauguration day in DC, have had their cases dismissed! The defendants were looking at decades in prison. Prosecutors argued that by simply attending a demonstration that included attacks on property, all those present were part of a conspiracy to riot. The prosecution was caught red-handed tampering with video evidence to vilify the defendants, in addition to working with pro-Trump far-right groups.

Both of these cases demonstrate the extent to which the state is willing to go to railroad and humiliate those they assume are "guilty" of challenging the status quo. Most cases do not get nearly as much attention as the ones mentioned above, and most people do not have as much public support either. There are many who are buried alive in prisons and jails because fixing evidence and manipulative plea deals are normal. The justice system is not "corrupt" in these instances; its creation is a means to control and punish the excluded and exploited, to discourage the rebellious, and the kill those this society considers expendable.

While we should celebrate these legal victories, we cannot forget that for the misery of justice to be finished once and for all, we will need to tear the legal system itself to shreds.

*"The influential [insurrectionary] minority works through resonance, not through control. It assumes risks to create inspiring models and new possibilities, and to criticize convenient lies. It enjoys no intrinsic superiority and falling back on the assumption of such will lead to its isolation and irrelevance. If its creations or criticisms do not inspire people, it will have no influence. Its purpose is not to win followers, but to create social gifts that other people can freely use."*

- from "The Rose of Fire Has Returned: The Struggle for the Streets of Barcelona," 2012.